

Don't Let The Winter Blues Get You Down

from the American Counseling Association

It's not uncommon in these winter months to feel a little sad, or lacking in energy, often seemingly for no real reason. While experts aren't sure exactly what causes these mid-winter blues, they do have a name for it – Seasonal Affective Disorder, or S.A.D.

Mental health experts think such feelings, when they occur regularly, are a reaction to the reduced amounts of sunlight and activity that most of us face in the winter.

There's evidence for that in the fact that S.A.D. occurs more frequently, though not exclusively, in the northern areas of the country. An estimated 9% of the population in the northern parts of the U.S. is affected by S.A.D., but even in places like Florida, winter blues affect an estimated 1.5% of the population.

S.A.D. usually appears as a form of depression, often mild, but sometimes severe. For most people the symptoms will include reduced energy, fewer activities, and loss of interest in normally enjoyable things.

Fortunately, there are ways to fight these mid-winter blahs. Since reduced winter sunlight and S.A.D. are connected, one simple remedy is getting out more into the daylight. Researchers report even a ten minute exposure to the sun can help brighten a person's mood and overall attitude.

There's also evidence that increasing your level of exercise can help limit those winter blues. Even on the coldest days, just bundling up and getting out for a walk or to play with the kids or dog can improve your day.

It also helps to put some extra effort into activities you know bring you joy. Getting together with family or friends, going to a movie, working at a favorite hobby, or just lunching with someone special, can all help raise your spirits. What you want to avoid is withdrawing and just sitting around focusing on feeling blue.

Unfortunately, in some cases S.A.D. can be a very serious, even life-threatening problem. It can cause depression serious enough to raise the chances of suicide or to require hospitalization. If you find that your winter blues, or those of someone close to you, are severe enough to truly affect your life negatively, talk to your family physician or consult a professional counselor.

From counseling, to various light treatments, to pharmaceutical therapies, there are a variety of options that mental health professional have available to help keep S.A.D. from ruining your life.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org

###

words: 394